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AUTHOR Ortiz, Flora Ida
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ABSTRACT

The experiences of Hispanic American female college students were studied over a 2-year period, based on interviews with 80 students and some staff members. Hispanic American female students fell into two major groups: (1) those few who attended private or specialized public schools; and (2) those who attended public schools or general private schools. Both of these groups of women experienced different socialization processes within the college. The first group entered the university with high qualifications and aspirations, and they enrolled in the physical sciences and mathematics programs. The first disorienting experiences usually came when they attended their first classes: they were singled out and their work was severely marked. The result was that over 50 percent who declared science/mathematics as majors withdrew from these curricula. A small group worked very hard to attain academic success. The other group of students were more oriented to peers than to academic pursuits. They were likely to persist if certain support services were utilized and if they did well in their courses. Students became active in campus political interests largely when academic services were not readily accessible. The situation of graduate students is also briefly addressed. (SW)

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The Recruitment and Retention Patterns of Hispanic American Women in College

Flora Ida Ortiz
University of California, Riverside

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Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Montreal, April 1983.

Hispanic American Women in Higher Education

Higher education is stratified along two dimensions. Men teach, administer and conduct and report research within the institution and women provide the support services for the above mentioned activities in which men engage. During the past two decades women have seriously attempted to assume those posts which have been exclusive to men. More specifically, Hispanic American women have just recently sought access to higher education. This report is directed at examining those aspect which have a bearing on obtaining critical posts in higher education particularly as they apply to Hispanic American women as students.

Theoretical Framework

Researchers (Argyris, 1958; Merton, 1960) have examined why and how individuals become attached to institutions. Other researchers (Schein, 1970; Becker, 1956; 1964; 1956; Ortiz, 1982) have examined how institutions go about socializing individuals so that they develop loyalties and commitments to the organizations in which they participate. Some researchers (Kanter, 1977; Hennig and Jardim, 1976) have attempted to relate both dimensions, the psychological and sociological, to the meaningful participation of women in organizations. This study attempts to show how psychological and sociological factors impact upon the Hispanic American woman as she attempts to gain access in higher education. Additionally, this study specifies certain cultural characteristics which also affect the differential access of Hispanic American women to higher education. The focus is on the university student career.

Methodology

Interview data were collected from the Hispanic American female students during a two-year period. The sample was drawn to include students in the different undergraduate and graduate levels. A total of 80 students were interviewed. From the interview data, a sample of professors, deans, chairs, and other officials were interviewed as well. These individuals were those

mentioned in the interviews as key persons in affecting these students positively or negatively. Relevant documents were collected, compiled and analyzed.

This repost focuses on selected data which explain the particularistic manner by which Hispanic American women are socialized within the university.

Analysis

Entry into the University Institution

Hispanic American women students fall into two major groups: those few who have attended private or specialized public schools and those who come directly from the public schools or general private schools. Those women who have attended special high school are well trained, have high grade point averages and score well on college entrance examinations. They are students who enroll in the physical sciences and mathematics programs. Most of the Hispanic American women who come from public high schools are inadequately prepared. Their grade point averages are at or below average and they score poorly in the college entrance examinations. Many of these students are accepted into the university under the special admissions policy. These students register at the university by fail to declare a major area of study.

Both of these groups of women undergo different socialization processes as they make their way through the institution. The first group will be examined first. The women coming from special training schools enter the university with high expectations and aspirations. Their experiences at the high school level have generally been very rewarding. They anticipate the same from the university. These women also come from higher socio-economic families, therefore, their social skills are sophisticated and they begin their university careers as gregarious, enthusiastic students. Most of them also do not view their ethnicity as an aspect about which they should be concerned.

The first disorienting experience usually comes when they attend their first classes. Since they have enrolled in physical sciences and mathematics classes, and since they have declared specific majors, they expect to have a stable, secure place to which to report. Since they are sophisticated and many have academic scholarships, their paper work is complete and in order. Therefore, the first place in which they confront the institution is in their

classes. The representatives of the institution in those classes are the professors and/or teaching assistants. These professors, then, have a profound effect on these students in an immediate and intimate way.

The confrontation takes the form of name identification. Hispanic American women, specifying a Spanish surname are immediately singled out. This process is exaggerated due to the fact that the particular student may be the one and only one in that class with a Spanish surname. The singling out process increases to the degree that the student's characteristics are identifiably Hispanic. The professor may use several means to differentiate. He/she may ask the student if she's positive she's in the right class. She may be asked to describe a particular laboratory or scientific procedure or she may be purposefully ignored.

The second point of confrontation comes when students turn in written work. The Spanish surname generates added scrutiny. The student's work may be evaluated in terms of the written format, grammatical and editorial usage and lastly, in terms of the content. The result is that these students' work is severly marked and the student is immediately alerted to the expectations.

Two groups of students emerge from this confrontation. One group is devastated and normally withdraws from this major. The overall effect is that within the first grading period over 50% of the Hispanic American women who have declared the physical sciences or mathematics areas as majors drop out. The second group of students take the marked up papers as challenges. They commit themselves to preparing better papers, they learn to anticipate the professors' expectations and continue. This is a very small group.

As the group members advance through their courses, they become more and more isolated in two different ways. First, they seldom have other Hispanic Americans as class or laboratory mates. Second, since they know they must perform so highly, they spend more and more time studying and working. This leads to curtailing the development of interpersonal relationships with others. These students, however, do become highly successful students.

There are some social consequences. One of the consequences is that other Hispanic American students on campus view them as outsiders. Other students view them "strange" because "they aren't like other Hispanic Americans and because they don't mix easily with others." More importantly,

most of the other students don't acknowledge the presence of these students. In brief, what we see is a particular image which begins to emerge concerning there persons.

Professors, too, describe these students in a particular manner. Most of them don't seem to have a very vivid impression of them until they look them up in their scoring book. Then, they note they are good students because they turn in good work, but they tend to describe these students as not very verbal or too anxious to contribute to class discussion. They do admit the students respond when called upon, but they don't seem able to remember incidences when students have questions, comments, or creative contributions for the class. Students refer to class discussion as consisting of other students. These women describe how through the year they learn to be cautious and careful when speaking in class.

So, we have students being socialized in the university by the two most powerful agents: professors and peers. This socialization takes place primarily in the classroom setting. This group is also the group that adopts the most "academic" orientation towards university life. By the time these students are juniors, their school careers are very stable and their priorities are clearly academic. Their social and personal preferences are secondary. They also build their aspirations towards a profession at this time.

The group that dropped out joins the group which had originally come from the general private and public schools. These students' orientations turn to peers' influences. We find these students unable to determine an area of concentration and a lack of career aspiration. Attending the university is the goal achieved and it is difficult for these students to assume another.

The immediate consequence is that they need help in deciding what classes to attend. They go to various departmental offices and their friends. They "shop around" by sitting in on classes before deciding what to take, or they decide to take the courses someone suggested in a partucular office. Since the most practical suggestions which can be offered to these students are to take the required courses, these students tend to find themselves in those courses during their first term. The most damaging result can be when a student is not taking a single course that she is committed to.

The reason this is so is because students attending the <u>required</u> courses

take with them an attitude and norm which may not be the healthiest. Moreover, these classes tend to be large, general and consist of teaching assistants. All of these characteristics contribute to an ambiguous, loose structure which does not aid the student in her search for an area of study. Instead, it leads to confusion, frustration and finally, diversion away from academic work to other university activities. The ultimate consequence is that these students' most influential group becomes other students. Professors, instruction and academic pursuits take a secondary role. Over the long term, choice of major areas of concentration are postponed and a great number of these students take over four years to complete their bachelor's degree.

Retention

So far, we've presented those students who enter the university. Two major groups have been identified. These two groups' characteristics become more pronounced as they remain on campus. The first group tends to complete the bachelor's degree the same as everyone else. Many of these students pursue graduate degrees. Some obtain employment in various agencies. In general, this group is a successful academic group. They are less successful socially. During the past decade, these students have had access to the leading university campuses for graduate training. Barring severe financial hardship, these students have tended to take advantage of these opportunities.

It must be remembered that the first group is a very small one. Most of the Hispanic American women fall in the second group. As they make their way through the university several aspects become important. Also, this group fragments itself in various directions. Several characteristics condition the manner in which they splinter. First, this group tends to have financial difficulties. Many students have qualified for grants, scholarships and financial aid. This support is dependent on good academic grades. Second, this group does not tend to come well prepared for academic rigor, therefore, maintaining good grades is problematic. Third, since they have not declared a major area of study, since they are unsure about their aspirations, they tend to go for help to general university offices such as the financial aid office, the undergraduate degree office, or to their friends. The result is that they obtain general rather than specific information regarding their

academic work. Fourth, since their primary support system is their friends, these students tend to take similar courses and these Hispanic American women form small university and social groups. Fifth, the overall organizational image is, then, created that these students are highly dependent on each other and unable to adapt to the university environment.

These students remain at the university to the extent that they do well in the courses they take. This may result in taking a large number of courses from one instructor, a large number of courses in a praticular area, or a number of "easy" courses. In any case, the result is that their program becomes skewed which hinders their completion of the degree in four years.

These students are also likely to remain at the university if certain critical support services are identified. For example, a particular professor may provide important timely information regarding their school work. They may encounter a counselor, dean or chair in a particular program who aids them in designing a program. They may also be able to obtain special help from program counselors such as Chicano Studies.

The students' retention rate increases to the extent that these critical support services are utilized. These support services are most valuable at certain point in the students' school life. First, during the admissions period, providing specific program information and optional program designs are critical. Second, during the first grading period. Students, regardless of whether they do well or poorly need support. This is especially important when students don't know what area to major in. The help they need at this time is specific academic skill aid if they are doing poorly and programatic design information if they are doing well. The important consideration seems to be that specificity is what is most useful to these students. A consequence of aid at this juncture is that these students may be aided in giving primacy to their academic work rather than other activities. The highest drop out rate occurs at this time. Students who do poorly in their first examination of the university term are most apt to leave then.

Third, one of the characteristics of this group of students is their ambivalence about academic activities and what that entails. Therefore, one of the support services they desperately need is a continuous and systematic informational system which invites them to academic endeavors. Posters are

somewhat effective, but personal correspondence and solicitation is the most effective. Scheduled study and discussion sessions are particularly important. The influence is particularly pertinent during the first year. Students describe the influence of particular study sessions, e.g., a Saturday afternoon music workshop, a Wednesday evening film viewing class, or a Monday afternoon graduate students' work presentation in anthropology. The value of these sessions takes three forms: students obtain additional information regarding a particular area of study, they are able to work with other students in academic activities besides class and they are able to meet superiors, professors, professsionals, or graduate students who have been successful in pursuing academic activities. The result is that these students are aided in granting primacy to academic work in a very legitimate manner.

Fourth, students will divert themselves to other activities to the extent that academic services are not readily accessible. For example, Hispanic American women finding it problematic to be acceptable academically or socially, turn to other activities in order to gain prominance in the campus. This is particularly true of those women who had good high school training, who are bright but don't know quite how to handle the university system. The activities which are most attractive to these women are political. Their propensity to grant primacy to this activity is dependent on the university climate and the degree to which they can gain visibility and leadership legitimacy. The data for this study indicate that those women who in fact acquire campus leadership in these activities, sought academic legitimacy before turning to campus political interests. These students do well enough in their courses to pass them, master exceptional interpersonal and political skills and tend to remain at the university well beyond four years before obtaining their first degree.

Ironically, those university means who are the most influential with these students, i.e., deans, counselors, chairs, and professors nurture the political orientation by their treatment of these students. They do this in several ways. First, the students are denied academic support as described above. Second, the students are challenged personally rather than academically. Third, the students are ignored or treated condescendingly.

The students react to this by mastering political and interpersonal skills in order to deal with those who challenge them, rather than mastering the

academic skills in order to challenge the ideas and content presented. There are certain important implications which arise from this phenomenon. One of them is that the university has become an arena for this particular group of students which teaches and nurtures the mastery of political skills. Mastering these skills means that they must be practiced somewhere in some way. Finally, an image is created that this group of students are politicians, trouble makers, or rabble rousers rather than academicians. The long term result is that the most able of the Hispanic American women participate in a manner that is not the same as for other women.

To the extent that these students who seek internal support systems and cannot locate them will resort to external ones. The most common support for these women is marriage. Many Hispanic American women get married early in their university life. They are also likely to marry non-university men. The more distant they view themselves from the university, the more likely it is they will marry non-university men. The more likely they marry non-university men, the more likely it is they will drop out of the university in the subsequent term. The result is that there is another major dropout rate during the second year. These women are likely to have children immediately and not likely to return to the university. A few will return after their child is a few years old. This is more likely if the child can be taken care of by the student's mother. Therefore, we have a growing number of Hispanic American women who return to obtain their bachelor's degree after marriage and the birth of a child. These women are oriented towards obtaining a degree in order to have access to a good job. Many aspire to teach. These students confront the university system for the second time. They know that there are many ways to waste time and that there are many courses which don't apply directly to their program. They also know they probably won't be able to find any one person who can tell them precisely what courses to take. They, therefore, first collect all of the written material they can find regarding their program. They write up the list of courses they think they'd like to take which are directly applicable to their program. They also list those courses which are applicable to their program and find out if there are equivalencies. After they know what the written material says regarding their proposed program they make appointments with all of the persons who might know about the program. They also talk to all of them. They compare and assess the information they get. They determine who is responsible for validating all records and they enroll in the relevant courses. They probably won't seek any more help until

they're ready to graduate. They go to the graduation office with all of their records of courses completed, etc. They have their records validated and proceed to graduate. These students' intentions have been focused on completing the requirements for their degrees. They have utilized the offices when necessary, but have remained independent of them.

These students have the same orientation towards their courses. They attend class. They determine what the expectations are. They but the books if they have to. They read what is absolutely necessary. They turn in their written reports early or on time. They fulfill all of the requirements. These students don't tend to do much more. As a consequence their familiarity with the university is limited to those areas which they must interact. The library resources are never totally familiar to them. Neither are all the rest of the academic and cultural resources. The use of the university is pragmatic and temporary. Their priorities are with their family and their seeking of future employment.

The irony in this practice is that the best placement opportunities are available only to those who have exhausted the university resources, particularly the professors. Professors' letters of recommendation and professors' referrals are indispensable to the best posts. For Hispanic American women this is even more important. These students, however, do obtain a degree and they do it in a short time. It is not unusual to find some of these students carrying course overloads.

Graduate Students

Very few Hispanic American women enroll in graduate school. The most likely place to find them is in the teachin credential programs. The students tend to have liberal studies majors, but many of them have a Spanish major. The fields most likely to be represented are foriegn languages, sociology, and psychology. The students enroll in education with differing aspirations. Many believe they will serve their community in this way. Many discovered this was the best occupational option open to them. Many were accepted to this program and not to their individual discipline one.

These students again encounter the graduate cultural milieu. The professors' courses may be demanding. The students' groups will be diverse. Also, they will now have to apply what they've learned in a regular classroom setting. For

those students who have engaged in social and political activities, the actual teacher interaction activity is simple. The patience, the planning and the tedious routine of drill are characteristics they may not appreciate. Moreover, since teaching is a public activity, writing, speaking and appearance become very important aspects in their success. Those aspects play an important role in the placement of the students, in the acceptance of the student-teacher by the host institution, and finally, in the evaluation by the university and the host institution. There is one other aspect to consider in professional graduate programs. They have to acquire credentials dependent on tests. Hispanic American women don't do will in these tests. This aspect is of increasing importance in all fields due to society's demands on competency. Therefore, Hispanic American women may complete their graduate work, but may not be able to obtain a credential due to their inability to pass the national tests.

Those women who don't go into education graduate programs tend to go into foreign languages, psychology and sociology. The difficulties in these areas are in having access to the leading professors, the rigorous courses and critical experiences such as teaching or conducting research. Most Hispanic American women decide to enter graduate school on their own. Other women tend to be encouraged by professors who later refer them to the activities listed above. Since Hispanic American women are, then, on their own, it again becomes problematic as to which courses to take, what areas to specialize in and how to avail themselves of teaching and research experiences. One mechanism used in the past decade, has been that grants and financial aid have been contingent on these special assignments. However, as these opportunities are being withdrawn, the Hispanic American graduate woman student is being left on her own.

The successful Hispanic American woman obtains a graduate degree. The successful acquisition is, again, primarily in education, social work, foreighn languages, psychology and sociology. Very few HispanicAmerican women embark on areas different from the ones mentioned above.

A few changes have occurrred during the past decade. Hispanic American women have been obtaining advanced degrees in administration, medicine and law. The numbers are very low, but they, nevertheless, indicate a gradual change. Many of these women have availed themselves of special grants, scholarships and fellowships. The primary problem encountered by these women is their lack of

adequate preparation for the rigors of the field. These students find that they are behind the rest of the candidates and that they have to study longer and harder in order to catch and and keep up. The women who are most likely to obtain the professional degree are those who don't have family and home obligations. Later, these women are also the ones to take advantage of employment opportunities away from the area.

Conclusions

It has been seen how Hispanic American women make their way through the university system. It has also been seen how the university has very few or very weak mechanisms by which to help these students when they enter the university. These students are also unable to obtain the help they need in order to remain. The result is that over 50% of the Hispanic American women drop out of the university within the first year.

Those who remain do so because of particular forces which aid them. First, their own personal ambitions and fortitude helps them to remain. Second, there are persons such as professors, counselors, chairs and deans who periodically provide services to students which ultimately contribute to their retention. Third, there are some programs such as Chicano Studies, which provide information support and help which students utilize. Fourth, providing support and help at critical times becomes important in retention. Fifth, to the degree that students can engage and be successful in academic activities or endeavors increases the likelihood that they will remain.

The consequences of weak or absent support systems in the university are threefold. One, students cannot be retained; two, students who are retained are influenced by their peers rather than professors or other academic personnel; three, students engage in political activities which may contribute to changes within the academic climate. Each of these consequences affects both the university and the individual.

Undergraduate students exert their power over the university through their political activity. Graduate students exert their power over the university by remaining independent of it.